



Guidance for Working With the Media

Preparation **Before you pitch a story**

- Carefully identify people who are subject matter experts at your facility who could speak for you. Make sure they are credible, can answer questions crisply and effectively, and are not likely to get nervous in front of a camera.
- Consider media training for staff that has never spoken to a reporter and for those who have but could use a refresher.
- Draft all potential questions—including the “scary” or “worst case scenario” questions your utility may be asked and work with your team to develop responses that are easily understood by all audiences.
- Practice answering questions so that when the reporter asks, the answers come easily.
- Use your network—check in with trusted colleagues at other utilities who have had successful results with the media for advice and counsel on pitching your story.
- Research who would cover public health, utilities, or the environment in your media outlets, and study what they write about so that when it’s time to approach them with a story idea, you can personalize it to them. It’s important to keep this list updated, so check it quarterly, as reporters move positions frequently.
- Consider hiring a consultant for help with media preparation and training if this is new to your team.

Execution **Making the pitch**

- Most reporters today prefer to be pitched by email.
- Your email pitch should be one to three sentences, getting to the heart of what you’re offering right away.
- Think like your customer. What are they most concerned about? Want to know? Write it with them in mind.
- The best pitches are tied to current or trending news – try to use an angle that already has legs to it.
- The subject line is the most important part of the pitch email. Reporters receive hundreds of email pitches each day, yours will need to stand out. Make it descriptive, aspirational, and action oriented. For example: a story you pitch to talk about results of PFAS testing might say: Residents of ABC Town Can Rest Assured No Forever Chemicals Found in Local Farms.
- Send story ideas or news releases directly to individuals, not a list, and don’t CC other reporters.
- Never send an unsolicited attachment. News organizations are wary of viruses and will almost never open an attachment they haven’t asked for. So, offer photos or graphics, then wait for them to accept the offer before sending.

A Reporter Bites

Now What?

When a reporter likes your pitch, it's time to spring into action.

- Get back to the reporter immediately to confirm interest, information needs, and deadlines.
- Review all the questions you had prepped for in advance, that are most likely to get asked by the reporter and conduct a mock interview with your spokesperson to ensure they are comfortable with questions they are most likely to be asked. Include the “worst-case” questions you think are unlikely to get asked but would rattle your spokesperson.
- Prepare a digital media kit with key graphics to share with the reporter to help visually communicate your key messages. You can provide this on a branded flash drive or a link to a page at your website that's just for the media.
- Consider bringing the reporter on site and show them parts of your treatment process, lab facilities, sampling equipment, etc.
- Consider making an audio or video recording of the interview for your files. This can help you provide constructive feedback to your spokesperson after the interview to improve their performance next time, give you valuable protection against the risk of being misquoted by the reporter, and provide great content you can reuse for social media.

Follow Up **This is always necessary**

- Once you've made contact and are in conversation, make sure you are always helpful and responsive. Be someone they know is a competent source that makes their job easier.
- Invite media to organizational events and treat them as an important guest.
- Follow up an email pitch in three days, five days, and seven days.
- Your follow-up email can be as simple as forwarding the message you originally sent and asking, “Any interest?”
- In your second follow up, offer an image, video, or infographic that you didn't offer previously.
- In your third follow up, offer a specific person to them they can interview, with a short bio embedded in the email.



When You're Not Pitching

- Help reporters and producers by doing the prep work for the story—package your story so it's ready to go. Line up the video, imagery, and interviews with farmers, plant operators or engineers, and consumers, all the people involved.
- Continue to stay in contact long after they run your story. Send reporters story ideas that don't involve your organization but could benefit them. Don't be the one who only calls when they need a favor.
- Primary research you conduct can often be the basis for a positive news article, so share customer survey results and other research that informs decisions and policies being made at your utility.
- Provide special behind-the-scenes tours of the treatment process to reporters.
- Make sure all members of your agency that may end up in front of a camera or microphone have been media trained.